ITEM NUMBER: 1 (Suppl) DATE: 06/09/21



Atascadero City Council

Staff Report - City Attorney

### SUPPLEMENTAL STAFF REPORT REGARDING DOVE CREEK MINI-STORAGE PROJECT (DEV20-0076)

### RECOMMENDATION

All Members of the City Council should participate in the hearing on the Appeal of the Dove Creek Mini-Storage Project (DEV20-0076).

### DISCUSSION

This is a Supplemental Staff Report ("Report") to the Staff Report which was included with the Agenda Packet posted on June 4, 2021. The purpose of this Report is to address the points raised in a June 1, 2021 letter ("Letter") from Kate Neiswender (attorney for Scott Newton) to City Attorney Brian Pierik (Attachment A) requesting recusal of Mayor Pro Tem Heather Newsom and Council Member Susan Funk on the grounds of alleged bias against the Dove Creek Mini-Storage Project (DEV20-0076).

On September 10, 2019, the City Council voted to overturn the action of the Planning Commission in regard to a proposed mini-storage project at Dove Creek by Scott Newton ("Prior Project"). The three votes in favor of overturning the Planning Commission action were by Mayor Heather Moreno, Susan Funk and Roberta Fonzi and the vote to not overturn the Planning Commission action was by Mayor Pro Tem Charles Bourbeau. Council Member Heather Newsom was absent.

On December 10, 2019, there was a City Council meeting and the Council voted to introduce an ordinance for a first reading of the Title 9 amendments where mini-storage was proposed to be removed from the public zone. There was no second reading on that ordinance.

On January 28, 2020, there was a City Council Meeting and a motion to introduce the ordinance and remove the proposed change to the public zone and continue to allow mini storage by Conditional Use Permit that was made by Council Member Susan Funk and seconded by Council Member Heather Newsom. The motion was passed by a vote of three in favor (Heather Moreno, Heather Newsom and Susan Funk) and two opposed (Charles Bourbeau and Roberta Fonzi). See Minutes for January 28, 2020, Attachment B

In 2020, Scott Newton submitted a revised project with a reduced development footprint and enhanced creek restoration and landscaping designated DEV20-0076 ("Current Project)

On November 18, 2020, the Design Review Committee (DRC) discussed the Current Project. There was a Motion by Committee member Duane Anderson and seconded by Committee member Emily Baranek to approve the project concept design to include public assembly (community room) and mini-storage and that the committee is in agreement that the design and land use is compatible with the General Plan Policy. The Motion passed by with three affirmative votes (Duane Anderson, Emily Baranek and Council Member Mark Dariz and one no vote (Mayor Pro Tem Heather Newsom). See Minutes from DRC Meeting of November 18, 2020, Attachment C.

On May 4, 2021, the Planning Commission voted 4 to 3 to approve a Conditional Use Permit for the Current Project.

On May 6, 2021, there was an appeal filed by Mayor Pro Tem Heather Newsom of the Planning Commission action which stated that she does not feel the project meets the fourth finding: the proposed project or use will not be inconsistent with the character of the immediate neighborhood or contrary to its orderly development. See Attachment 5 to the Staff Report.

On May 7, 2021, there was an appeal filed by Council Member Susan Funk which explains why she filed an appeal of the Planning Commission action. See Attachment 6 to the Staff Report.

Thus, all of the current City Council Members have previously taken positions in regard to the Prior Project or Current Project or both.

### JUNE 1, 2021 LETTER FROM KATE NEISWENDER

## The Appeals by Heather Newsom and Susan Funk Are Authorized by the Atascadero Municipal Code

The Letter (page 1, paragraph 3) has a statement that the Mayor Pro Tem Heather Newsom and Council Member Susan Funk "did not appeal as the City Council, as the Council never met to discuss this." However, the appeals filed by Heather Newsom and Susan Funk do not purport to be filed as the City Council. Heather Newsom and Susan Funk are entitled by Atascadero Municipal Code Section 9-1.111 to file an appeal as individual members of the City Council and are not required to pay an appeal fee.

### Claims of Bias

The Letter provides what it claims are examples of bias against the project by Mayor Pro Tem Newsom and Council Member Funk. Each of these claims of bias are without merit for the reasons stated below.

A. Heather Newsom

- 1. Claimed Bias Based on Vote at DRC Meeting on November 18, 2020
  - a. Argument in Letter (page 2):

At the DRC Meeting on November 18, 2020 Heather Newsom voted against the motion to approve the project concept design to include public assembly (community room) and mini-storage and that the committee is in agreement that the design and land use is compatible with the General Plan Policy.

b. Response:

(1) Based upon the legal authorities set forth later in this Report, the fact that Heather Newsom voted no on the Motion at the DRC meeting on November 18, 2020 does not require her to recuse herself from participating in the hearing on the appeal on June 9, 2021.

(2) Furthermore, to follow the logic of the Letter, Council Member Mark Dariz would be required to recuse himself from participating in the hearing on the appeal on June 9, 2021 because he voted in favor of the Motion. Notably, the Letter fails to ask that Mark Dariz be recused from participating on June 9, 2021. In addition, Council Member Charles Bourbeau voted at the September 10, 2019 City Council meeting to affirm the action of the Planning Commission which approved the Prior Project. Thus, the Letter itself is bias in that the Letter only seeks the recusal of Council Members who have not taken a position in favor of the project.

(3) The Letter fails to mention the vote by Heather Newsom at the City Council Meeting on January 28, 2020 mentioned above in which Heather Newsom voted in favor of the motion to introduce the ordinance and remove the proposed change to the public zone **and continue to allow mini storage by Conditional Use Permit.** 

- 2. Claimed Bias Based on Appeal of Planning Commission Action
  - a. Argument in Letter (page 2):

In the appeal by Heather Newsom of the Planning Commission action she stated: "I feel that it does not meet the fourth finding; the proposed project or use will not be inconsistent with the character of the immediate neighborhood or contrary to orderly development."

b. Response:

Based upon the legal authorities set forth later in this Report the fact that Heather Newsom made this statement in her appeal of the Planning Commission action does not require her to recuse herself from participating in the hearing on the appeal on June 9, 2021.

- B. Susan Funk
  - 1. Claim Bias Base on Statement in Public Forum in September of 2019
    - a. Argument in Letter (page 2):

Council Member Funk said in public forum that "one more unit of self storage in the city is too many."

b. Response:

(1) The Letter does not identify in what "public forum" this statement was allegedly made by Council Member Funk. However, Ms. Neiswender has subsequently indicated that this "public forum" was on September 26, 2019 at the Tolosa Winery, the Home Builders Association Public Officials Night. Council Member Funk denies making any such statement at this event on September 26, 2019, or at any other time, and further that this alleged statement is not consistent with her opinion, then or now.

(2) The Home Builders Association Public Officials Night was not a "public forum" as it was not open to the public.

(3) September 2019 would have been the Prior Project, not the Current Project which was not submitted by the applicant until 2020.

- 2. Claim of Bias Based on Statements Made in January 2020 Council Meeting
  - a. Argument in Letter (pages 2-3):

In January 2020, there was a text amendment before the City Council which would have banned self-storage in the P zone and Council Member Funk made statements at that meeting about a self-storage project at Dove Creek.

b. Response:

(1) The City Council meeting to which Letter apparently refers took place on January 28, 2020. The Applicant had not even submitted an application for the Current Project (which is the subject of appeal hearing on June 9, 2021) by January 28, 2020.

(2) In addition, based upon the legal authorities set forth later in this Report, even assuming Council Member Funk made a statement that was critical of mini-storage in this area of the City on January 28, 2020, such statements would not require Council Member Funk to recuse herself from participating in the hearing on the appeal on June 9, 2021.

(3) The Letter fails to mention the vote by Susan Funk at the City Council Meeting on January 28, 2020 mentioned above in which Susan Funk voted in favor of the motion to introduce the ordinance and remove the proposed change to the public zone and continue to allow mini storage by Conditional Use Permit.

### 3. Claim of Bias Based on Appeal and Facebook Posting

### a. Argument in Letter (page 3):

Susan Funk presented her appeal in two ways: there was a written appeal and then she posted a very similar statement on Facebook. Since that posting, Funk has gone on to "like" only those comments to her Facebook post which are critical of the Project.

### b. Response:

(1) The appeal by Susan Funk (Attachment 6 to Staff Report) does <u>not</u> take a position on the merits of the Current Project.

(2) The claim that Susan Funk "liked" only comments on her Facebook post that are critical of the Project is false. A screenshot of the Facebook pages of Susan Funk regarding her appeal of the Project is Attachment D. There are two "likes" (thumbs up) by Susan Funk which are for the comments by Amoreena Bremgartner Anker ("Thank you Susan Funk!"), see red star, and by Marcia Beckley-Kane ("Thanks Susan for taking action!), see yellow star. Neither of these two comments are critical of the Project.

(3) The Letter fails to mention that the Facebook page of Susa Funk (<u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkQ7cSVKhwc</u>) includes a video she posted on May 7, 2021 in which she read from her appeal (Attachment 6 to Staff Report) than then she made the following statement:

"There's a, there's al...there was also previously a, an appeal filed by Mayor Pro Tem Newsom that happened well before I, after I had drafted mine but before I delivered it. So I decided to go ahead and deliver mine just so that there's no guestion about a physical letter signed, being an authentic appeal. And, and also be...and I'm sharing it and filing it because I want the applicant and supporters and opponents of the project all to know that I'm requesting additional information in order to help me be able to visualize this project and its impact. As council members we are required to be open to all matters, and not to make our decision before we have heard the full hearing and have everybody's comment. That's what the public process of public hearings is for so that we can have all that information and everybody gets to have their say before the council makes a decision. And I very definitely am honoring that commitment and look forward to getting a picture that'll help...maybe it'll help some of the rest of you but certainly it will help me in understanding this project. There's, you know, I don't...it's not clear to me how high it is with the filter and how that changes the topography of the site, to what, you know, the vertical and horizontal displacement on that fa...that southfacing thing. And I just think it will help us all to be working on the same page,

or at least a little closer as we consider this particular decision. Thanks." (Emphasis Added)

- 4. Claim of Bias Regarding Lack of "Southern View" Elevation
  - a. Argument in Letter (page 3):

The Funk appeal criticized the lack of a "southern view" elevation for the Project, which was already in the material submitted to the City. The City requires foursided architecture along with a landscape plan, and it was provided.

b. Response:

(1) A two dimensional view (2D) is "flat" as compared to a three dimensional view (3D) which provides a superior visual concept of the project from that view. The Applicant provided a 3D view from the north, east and west, but did not provide a 3D view from the south. Thus, Susan Funk was correct about the lack of a southern view from the standpoint of the lack of a 3D southern view as compared to the views from the other three directions.

(2) Even if Susan Funk were incorrect about the lack of a southern view (which she described as the longest face), that is not evidence of bias. At most, it would show she was not correct about the lack of a southern view. However, as noted, she was correct about the lack of a southern view from the standpoint of the lack of a 3D southern view

- 5. Claim of Bias Regarding Statement About Confusion of Planning Commission
  - a. Argument in Letter (page 3):

Ms. Funk also claimed that the Planning Commission was confused, despite the fact that they voted twice to approve the Project, once 3- to-2 and once 4-to-3, after hours of deliberation.

b. Response:

Susan Funk apparently perceived some confusion on the part of the Planning Commission in regard to the Project based on her viewing of the Planning Commission meetings. However, even if the perception by Council Member Funk about some confusion by the Planning Commission is not correct, this would not show bias.

### Legal Analysis of Cases Cited in Letter

The Letter cites a number of cases which shall be addressed here.

1. <u>Petrovich Development v. City of Sacramento</u> (2020) 48 Cal. App. 5th 963

The Letter cites the <u>Petrovich</u> case for the proposition that there is a biased decision maker because the Council Member not only voiced opposition at a local neighborhood association meeting, but then also organized an opposition to the vote and provided talking points to other councilmembers in advance of the meeting.

However, the <u>Petrovich</u> case would support a position that there is no bias in the current situation. The <u>Petrovich</u> Court states that "concrete facts" are needed to establish bias, such as whether the councilmember "assisted opponents," "organized the opposition at the hearing," or "acted as an advocate". In fact, the <u>Petrovich</u> court explicitly stated that making a statement that a project "does not fit … [does] not disqualify [the official] from voting on the issue" and is not a "concrete fact" supporting bias. (<u>Petrovich</u>, at 974.)

There are no concrete facts indicating that any Atascadero Council Member is actively organizing or coordinating with an opposition group to defeat the project, to support a claim of bias, and therefore, the <u>Petrovich</u> case does not support the contentions in the Letter.

### 2. <u>Woody's Group, Inc. v. City of Newport Beach</u> (2015) 233 Cal. App. 4th 1012

The Letter also cites the <u>Woody's Group</u> case for the proposition that filing an appeal and stating an opposition to the project demonstrates bias.

However, <u>Woody's Group</u> explicitly states how the "mere fact the councilmember had filed an appeal was itself **not** enough to show an unacceptable probability of bias" (emphasis added) and there, the issue was allowing the Council Member to appeal, without following the Municipal Code requirements. There were also facts that showed that any Council Member "strongly believed" that the operations and the decision was inconsistent with the residential character of the area and the general plan, and therefore there was an unacceptable probability of bias. In fact, the <u>Woody's Group</u> case discussed how appeals may be taken from decisions of subordinate agencies if it is allowed under the Municipal Code. (See <u>Woody's Group</u>, at 1022-1024.)

Here, the appeal procedures are permitted by Atascadero Municipal Code Section 9.1-111 and there was no explicit statement indicating that the Councilmembers have "strong" oppositions to the project, in contrast to the <u>Woody's Group</u> case. As a result, the <u>Woody's Group</u> case does not support the contentions in the Letter.

3. Nasha v. City of Los Angeles (2004) 125 Cal. App. 4th 470

The Letter also cites the <u>Nasha</u> case and explained how there is bias where an official published an article in favor of a local homeowner's group and called the project a threat.

However, the Letter does not allege that any of the Councilmembers were involved any written or published articles against the projects, and the allegations involving comments in an unidentified public forum and Facebook have been addressed above, where Council Member Susan Funk does not take any position on the project. As a result, the <u>Nasha</u> case does not support the contentions in the Letter.

4. <u>Cohan v. City of Thousand Oaks</u> (1994) 30 Cal. App. 4th 547

The Letter also cites the <u>Cohan</u> case and claims that: (a) as appellants, the Council Members must present the appeal; (b) the description for the appeal is not clear enough to provide notice; and (c) cumulative procedural errors may result in an inadequate hearing.

However, <u>Cohan</u> does state that Council Members must individually present the appeal. With respect to the description not being clear, later cases indicate that appeals from the Planning Commission to the City Council are "de novo" and a simple description such as the appeal being "Based upon Police Department recommendation…" is sufficient to give adequate notice. (See <u>Breakzone Billiards v. City of Torrance</u> (2000) 81 Cal. App. 4th 1205, 1221-1222.) Lastly, the comment about cumulative procedural errors is not applicable, where, as noted above, there have been no procedural errors, much less a string of procedural errors. As a result, the <u>Cohan</u> case does not support the contentions in the Letter.

### CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, there is no merit to the claims in the Letter of bias on the part of Mayor Pro Tem Heather Newsom or Council Member Susan Funk. Therefore, Pro Tem Heather Newsom and Council Member Susan Funk, as well as the rest of the City Council Members, may participate in the hearing on the appeal of the Current Project set for June 9, 2021.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. June 1, 2021 letter from Kate Neiswender
- B. January 28, 2020 Minutes for City Council Meeting
- C. November 18, 2020 Minutes for Design Review Committee Meeting
- D. Screenshot of the Facebook pages of Susan Funk

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June 1, 2021

Brian Pierik Burke, Williams & Sorensen 2310 E Ponderosa Drive # 25 Camarillo, CA 93010

> Re: Dove Creek Self Storage -- Request for Recusal of Councilmembers Newson and Funk in Connection with the Hearing on the Newsom/Funk Appeal of the Planning Commission Approval

Dear Mr. Pierek:

I write to you in your capacity as City Attorney for the City of Atascadero. This office represents Scott Newton, project applicant for the Dove Creek Self Storage facility located at the intersection of 11450 Viejo Camino and 11505 El Camino Real (th e"Project").

In April 2021, the Planning Commission held the first of two hearings on this Project. After a lengthy hearing and deliberation, the Commission voted 3-to-2 in favor of the Project. On your advice, that vote was voided, on grounds there had to be a minimum of four votes in favor of the Project. That has <u>not</u> been the City's practice in the past; in fact, in 2019 the Planning Commission voted 3-to-2 in favor of a prior version of the Project and that vote was never challenged. As you are aware, an appeal was filed against the 3-to-2 approval in 2019, and the applicant incurred significant expenses as a result. We have determined there have been other votes of the Planning Commission that have been approved on a 3-to-2 vote, without a problem.

Regardless, the matter was re-set for May 4, 2021. After three hours of discussion, the Commissioners voted 4-to-3 to approve the Project. Shortly thereafter, two persons appealed the Commission decision: Heather Newsom and Susan Funk. They did not appeal as the City Council, as the Council never met to discuss this. Therefore, these are appeals by "aggrieved persons" as stated in Section 9-1.111 of the City ordinances. They did not, however, pay a fee, which is required of any appellant under the ordinance. For the City to permit an appeal by an aggrieved person (not the City Council or a councilmember on behalf of the public) is a gift of public funds, and improper.

We write to request that both Newsom and Funk recuse themselves, or be recused, from the hearing on the appeal. Their actions and statements have made it very clear that they are biased against the Project. Brian Pierik June 1, 2021 Page Two

<u>The First Dove Creek Project</u>: In 2019, the Dove Creek Self Storage project was presented to the Commission and then to the Council. It was a very different project than the one currently at issue. The first project included 81,000 sf of self-storage in eight buildings and a carertaker's residence. After a full hydrologic study, it was determined there would be .74 ac of basin/wetland restoration.

<u>The Current Project:</u> After the first project was turned down in late 2019, the Project was completely re-worked and revised. After months of meetings with City staff, the new Project downsized the self-storage by 32% and multiple changes were made to the appearance of the Project to make it more aesthetically pleasing. A workshop was added for the owner. Underground stormwater storage was added. An acre and-a-half (the "triangle" area) was not part of the project, but during hearings, the Planning Commission opted to put an Open Space easement over the triangle, despite the fact that it was not needed for the Project.

The current Project is visually different than the first proposal, and one-third smaller.

<u>The Newson Criticism Of The Project:</u> Heather Newsom is clearly biased against the project. Councilmember Newsom was the only member of the DRC who voted against the Project, saying the City Council had already made a determination that the Project was incompatible with the area. The DRC is only to consider aesthetics and did not opine on the compatibility of the use as it is outside of their purview. Newsom's vote about compatibility not aesthetics shows she pre-judged the Project and is not a fair, unbiased decision-maker.

She repeated that criticism of the Project in her written appeal, stating:

"I feel that it does not meet the fourth finding; the proposed project or use will not be inconsistent with the character of the immediate neighborhood or contrary to orderly development."

By clearly stating her bias, at the DRC meeting and in her appeal letter, she must be recused. The case law (discussed in detail below) confirm this.

<u>The Funk Criticism Of The Project:</u> In September of 2019, Councilmember Funk said in public forum that "one more unit of self storage in the city is too many."

In January of 2020, a text amendment was before the Council, which would have banned self-storage in the P zone. After Phil Dunsmore criticized the idea of <u>any</u> self-storage in a P zone, Funk agreed saying this:

"What we do with these plans is to provide clarity ... [we don't want a developer to say] 'Hey, we can stuff these full of storage units' only to find that's not what we mean by this ....

"So they bring us stuff we can say 'yes' to, with regard to mini-storage in Public. We are looking at a situation if the project we saw and reviewed before [the <u>first</u> Dove Creek self storage project] is one that **cannot meet the findings, it's**  Brian Pierik June 1, 2021 Page Three

**difficult to envision any project that would.** So to make the [text amendment] change does create greater clarity for people who are looking to see what they can do with those properties, so they are not putting money where it is ultimately not going to be supportable."

Therefore, she had decided that no self-storage project would be "supportable" in the P zone, and she made that statement with a direct reference to the first Dove Creek project. She has not even considered the current Project, because – as she has already said – "one more unit of self storage in the city is too many."

Just as with Councilmember Newsom, Funk appealed the Planning Commission decision as a private citizen, and like Newsom, failed to pay the fee required under 9-1.111. She presented her appeal in two ways: there was a written appeal and then she posted a very similar statement on Facebook. Since that posting, Funk has gone on to "like" only those comments to her Facebook post which are critical of the Project.

The Funk appeal criticized the lack of a "southern view" elevation for the Project, which was already in the material submitted to the City. The City requires four-sided architecture along with a landscape plan, and it was provided. Ms. Funk also claimed that the Planning Commission was confused, despite the fact that they voted <u>twice</u> to approve the Project, once 3-to-2 and once 4-to-3, after hours of deliberation.

The Funk appeal provides the applicant little to go on as to why the appeal was filed, despite the requirement for specifics in 9-1.111. Funk claims there was no southern elevation, but there was. Funk claims the Commissioners were "confused" but that does not provide a basis for the appeal. She also states that this decision should rest with the City Council, however based on the City's own codes, a Conditional Use Permit is clearly the responsibility of the Planning Commission. She reiterates her comments from the January 2020 Text Amendment hearing, saying the Project is:

"... a revised version of a land use for this specific property that the Council previously determined by a majority vote to be inconsistent with the surrounding neighborhood and its orderly development."

As she said in January of 2020, she does not think that any self-storage project would be "supportable." She repeats that in her appeal, which echoes her comments in September of 2019 that one more self-storage unit in Atascadero is "too many." This is clearly bias and Funk must be recused.

**Both Councilmembers Must Be Recused**: The case law shows what constitutes bias, sufficient to require a decision-maker to recuse herself (or be recused). The cases are clear that pre-judging a project (Newsom and Funk) and speaking publicly against a project before the Council hearing (Funk) are sufficient grounds for recusal.

There are some very recent cases that must be taken into consideration.

Brian Pierik June 1, 2021 Page Four

In 2020, the Court of Appeal held in *Petrovich Development v. City of Sacramento* 48 Cal, App. 5<sup>th</sup> 963 that:

"A decisionmaker must be unbiased (meaning that the decisionmaker has no conflict of interest, has not prejudged the specific facts of the case, and is free of prejudice against or in favor of any party). Allowing a biased decision maker to participate in the decision is enough to invalidate the decision." (*Woody's*, supra, at p. 1022; *Nasha*, supra,125 Cal.App.4th at p. 484; *Clark*, supra, 48 Cal.App.4th at p. 1171.)"

The *Petrovich* case involved a large multi-use development, including commercial and residential, that had been approved by the city in 2010. In 2014, the developer applied for a CUP

to put in a gas station as an adjunct to the grocery store on the site. *Like the situation here*, the zoning was proper if a CUP was obtained. The Planning Commission approved the CUP, and certain neighbors appealed to the City Council.

The facts in *Petrovich* are eerily familiar to the situation in Atascadero. Like appellant Newsom, the persons objecting to the CUP said the zoning was irrelevant, and that it was all about compatibility. One councilmember was very vocal in his opposition. The councilmember said at a local neighborhood association meeting: "I don't think a gas station fits in with what was originally proposed." He then organized opposition to the vote, and provided "talking points" to other councilmembers in advance of the meeting, saying he thought he had the votes to strike down the Planning Commission approval.

The Court of Appeal said this was bias, requiring recusal. It was not just the statement to the neighborhood association, but it was that in combination with the "talking points" provided to the other councilmembers. The Court reminded the parties that the law does not require the disappointed applicant to prove "actual bias. Rather, there must not be an *unacceptable probability of actual bias* on the part of a municipal decision maker." Here, for both Newsom and Funk, we have facts sufficient to show an unacceptable probability of actual bias.

In 2015, the Court of Appeal decided *Woody's Group v. City of Newport Beach* 233 Cal App. 4<sup>th</sup> 1012. In *Woody's*, the City Council overturned an approval by the Planning Commission, in which one of the councilmembers filed the appeal, and stated his strong opposition to the project. The Court of Appeal wrote;

"You cannot be a judge in your own case. In this case Councilmember Mike Henn, having already voiced his strong opposition to Woody's Group, Inc.'s application, was allowed to appeal the approval of Woody's application to the very body on which he sits, where he did his best to convince his colleagues to vote with him against the application."

The *Woody's* court was unhappy with the idea that any councilmember can be assumed to be acting on behalf of the public:

"We note in passing the obvious ipse dixit nature of the language in Resolution 2013-75. **The assumption that by definition a city council member** 

## who appeals is doing so 'for the benefit' of the residents, as distinct from some personal bias, is certainly not based in logic."

Funk did not give any substantive for her appeal, other than her "concerns" that the Planning Commission was confused, or that she didn't think the information presented was clear enough for <u>her</u>. This was not an appeal for the benefit of the public. This was an appeal due to Funk's stated bias that "one more unit of self storage in the city is too many." She posted her appeal on Facebook, and then proceeded to "like" only those comments that criticized or opposed the Project.

In 2004, the Second District published *Nasha v. City of Los Angeles* 125 Cal. App. 4<sup>th</sup> 480. In that matter, a Planning Commissioner wrote a little article for the local homeowners

group, calling the Project a "threat" to a wildlife corridor. The same Commissioner introduced the appellant to speak against the project at a neighborhood meeting.

The trial court held the article, the introduction and the Commissioner's obvious opposition was not enough to force the recusal. But the appellate court <u>overturned</u> the trial court and held that the Commissioner's authorship of the newsletter article gave rise to an unacceptable probability of actual bias and was sufficient to preclude him from serving as a "reasonably impartial, noninvolved reviewer." The appellate court held the Commissioner should have been recused, and that the Planning Commission decision had to be vacated.

*Compare this* to Funk's comment that one more storage unit is one too many, that no self-storage project can be "supportable" in P zoning, and her Facebook "likes" of comments critical of the Project. That clearly indicates bias. As for the Newsom comments, she stated at the DRC that the compatibility issue has already been decided and repeated that in her appeal letter. She has already pre-judged the Project; it is incontrovertible.

In *Cohan v. City of Thousand Oaks* (1994) 30 Cal. App. 4<sup>th</sup> 547, the issues involved a City Council appeal from a Planning Commission decision. In *Cohan*, the developer had been trying to get approval for a mixed use (condos and retail) project for 15 years. The appellate court noted a number of procedural violations, including waiving the mandatory 72 hour notice and putting the appeal on the agenda as an "urgency matter."

I would like you to read *Cohan* in light of the fact that the two appellant-councilmembers should be the ones who present the appeal. The appellants – not the applicant – must present their reasons why the decision should be overturned. The burden is on appellants, not the applicant, to show the appeal should be granted, and the Commission decision over-turned. The Atascadero appeal ordinance requires stated reasons for the appeal. The same requirement existed in the *Cohan* case. Because Newsom and Funk (not the Council as a whole) are the appellants, they should and must present the appeal and make the presentation and rebuttal. Neither woman can make the presentation against the Project, and then assume the dais and vote against the Project. Recusal is mandatory. If another person in the community had appealed the Commission's decision, that is the way it would be heard.

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"We presume that the City's ordinance requiring that the notice of appeal contain a statement of grounds was enacted for a purpose. The notice gives direction to both the adjudicatory body that has to decide the issues and those who may have to respond to the challenges to the ruling appealed. ... The Cohans had submitted, and the planning commission approved, at least six separate applications, asking for such varied approvals as a subdivision lot map, development allotments, and two oak tree permits. As applicants, they had a right to know what they needed to prove to satisfy their burden of proof at the hearing on the appeal."

Funk's appeal letter states that she had trouble visualizing the project; she observed the PC members were "confused." Newsom claims the Council has already determined that the proposed land use was inconsistent with the surrounding neighborhood. On this last point, we must remind you that the Council had the opportunity to strip self storage from the "P" zoning, and refused to do so.

Based on the *Cohan* language, it would appear the applicant does not have any advance notice of what is wrong with the project, other than the need to provide a better visual, as stated in Funk's second paragraph; again, that visual is already in the record.

The Atascadero ordinance states that an appellant must pay fees; the fees are waived only if the City Council is the appellant. The Council is <u>not</u> the appellant, Funk and Newsom are, acting alone. But neither woman paid fees. The cumulative effect of multiple procedural errors were important in *Cohan*, and important as well in the other cases cited. The *Cohan* Court stated:

"We agree that a trier of fact does not have to be completely indifferent to the general subject matter of the claim presented to be impartial. ... Nonetheless, a fair trial in a fair tribunal is a basic requirement of due process. ... A biased decisionmaker is constitutionally unacceptable. The right to a fair procedure includes the right to impartial adjudicators."

Again, both Susan Funk and Heather Newsom must recuse themselves.

As for the format of the appeal hearing: There is no format stated in City ordinances. It appears obvious that the applicant should get the same time to present the opposition to the appeal as Funk and Newsom have to present their appeal. If the two appellants have City staff present their appeal, then the applicant should have the same amount of time as staff to present the opposition. Last time, the appellant was given only three minutes; this is hardly fair.

Please call me to discuss this matter before the hearing is held on the appeal.

Respectfull M. Neiswender

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ITEM NUMBER 1 (Suppl) DATE 06/09/2021 ATTACHMENT B

### CITY OF ATASCADERO CITY COUNCIL

# MINUTES

Tuesday, January 28, 2020

City Hall Council Chambers, 4th floor 6500 Palma Avenue, Atascadero, California *(Entrance on Lewis Ave.)* 

City Council Regular Session:

6:00 P.M.

<u>City Council / Planning Commission</u> <u>Special Joint Meeting – Housing</u> <u>Element Update</u>: During Recess of the City Council Regular Meeting

### REGULAR SESSION - CALL TO ORDER: 6:00 P.M.

Mayor Moreno called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### ROLL CALL:

Present: Council Members Fonzi, Funk, Newsom, Mayor Pro Tem Bourbeau and Mayor Moreno

Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager Rachelle Rickard, Public Works Director Nick DeBar, Police Chief Jerel Haley, Community Development Director Phil Dunsmore, Fire Chief Casey Bryson, City Attorney Brian Pierik and Deputy City Manager/City Clerk Lara Christensen

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

MOTION:

- DN: By Council member Funk and seconded by Council Member Fonzi to:
  1. Approve this agenda as revised; and,
  - 2. Waive the reading in full of all ordinances appearing on this agenda, and the titles of the ordinances will be read aloud by the City Clerk at the first reading, after the motion and before the City Council votes.

Motion passed 5:0 by a roll-call vote.

### **PRESENTATIONS:**

### 1. Employee Recognition

City Manager Rickard presented the following employees with Service Awards:

- <u>5 Years:</u> Nick DeBar, Public Works Director/City Engineer
  - **<u>15 Years:</u>** Ryan Smith, WW Treatment Plant Operator II Tom Peterson, AFD Battalion Chief

### A. CONSENT CALENDAR:

- 1. <u>City Council Draft Action Minutes January 14, 2020</u>
  - <u>Recommendation</u>: Council approve the January 14, 2020 Draft City Council Meeting Minutes. [City Clerk]
- 2. December 2019 Accounts Payable and Payroll
  - Fiscal Impact: \$2,219,589.68
  - <u>Recommendation</u>: Council approve certified City accounts payable, payroll and payroll vendor checks for December 2019. [Administrative Services]

Council Members Fonzi and Funk requested that Item #A-3 be pulled from the Consent Calendar for further discussion and separate vote.

### MOTION: By Mayor Pro Tem Bourbeau and seconded by Council Member Newsom to approve Consent Calendar Items A-1 and A-2. *Motion passed 5:0 by a roll-call vote.*

- 3. 2020 Traffic Way Sanitary Sewer Improvements Design Services Award
  - Fiscal Impact: \$231,840.00
  - <u>Recommendation</u>: Council authorize the City Manager to execute a contract for \$231,840 with MNS Engineers, Inc. to provide design engineering services for the 2020 Traffic Way Sanitary Sewer Improvements Project (Project No. C2019W01). [Public Works]

Public Works Director DeBar answered questions from the Council.

### PUBLIC COMMENT:

The following citizens spoke on this item: None.

### Mayor Moreno closed the Public Comment period.

MOTION: By Council Member Fonzi and seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Bourbeau authorize the City Manager to execute a contract for \$231,840 with MNS Engineers, Inc. to provide design engineering services for the 2020 Traffic Way Sanitary Sewer Improvements Project (Project No. C2019W01). (Contract No. 2020-001) Motion passed 5:0 by a roll-call vote.

### UPDATES FROM THE CITY MANAGER:

City Manager Rachelle Rickard gave an update on projects and issues within the City.

### **COMMUNITY FORUM:**

The following citizens spoke during Community Forum: Jackie Kinsey (Exhibit A) and Max Zappas

### Mayor Moreno closed the COMMUNITY FORUM period.

**<u>RECESS</u>**: Mayor Moreno recessed the meeting at 6:33 p.m. to the City Council / Planning Commission Joint Special Meeting on the Housing Element Update.

**<u>RECONVENE</u>**: Following the Joint Special Meeting, Mayor Moreno reconvened the City Council Meeting at 9:30 p.m. with all present.

### B. PUBLIC HEARINGS:

### 1. <u>Title 9 Municipal Code Text Amendments (CPP19-0080)</u>

- Fiscal Impact: Staff expects minimal fiscal impact to the City from the adoption of the proposed code text amendments.
- <u>Recommendation</u>: Council introduce for first reading, by title only, a Draft Ordinance approving amendments to Title 9, Planning and Zoning, Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6 of the Atascadero Municipal Code for minor text corrections. [Community Development]

### Ex Parte Communications

Mayor Pro Tem Bourbeau reported speaking with several real estate agents in town as well as receiving an email from Scott Newton.

The remainder of the Council Members reported having no communications on this item.

Community Development Director Dunsmore gave the staff report and answered questions from the Council.

### PUBLIC COMMENT:

**MOTION:** 

The following citizens spoke on this item: Max Zappas, Scott Newton, and Eric Cleveland

### Mayor Moreno closed the Public Comment period.

By Council Member Funk and seconded by Council Member Newsom to introduce for first reading, by title only, a Draft Ordinance approving amendments to Title 9, Planning and Zoning, Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6 of the Atascadero Municipal Code for minor text corrections, with the following change to Exhibit A of the Draft Ordinance:

 Amend Table 3-3 (page 55 of the agenda packet) to remove the proposed changes to the Public Zoning District to continue to allow Mini Storage within the Public Zoning District as a conditionally allowed use

Atascadero City Council January 28, 2020 Page 3 of 4 Deputy City Manager/City Clerk Christensen read the title of the Ordinance:

### AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ATASCADERO, CALIFORNIA, AMENDING TITLE 9, PLANNING AND ZONING, CHAPTERS 2, 3, 4, AND 6 OF THE ATASCADERO MUNICIPAL CODE

Motion passed 3:2 by a roll-call vote. Bourbeau and Fonzi voted "NO".

### C. MANAGEMENT REPORTS: None.

### D. COUNCIL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMITTEE REPORTS:

The following Council Members made brief announcements and gave brief update reports on their committees since their last Council meeting:

Council Member Fonzi

1. SLO Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo)

Council Member Funk

1. Homeless Services Oversight Council

### E. INDIVIDUAL DETERMINATION AND / OR ACTION: None.

### F. ADJOURN

Mayor Moreno adjourned the meeting at 10:41 p.m.

MINUTES PREPARED BY: Lara K. Christensen

Deputy City Manager / City Clerk

The following exhibit is available for review in the City Clerk's office: • Exhibit A – Atascadero Library Events

### APPROVED: February 11, 2020

City Council Minutes Exhibit A Date: Januar DATE & 20009/2021

### FALL PREVENTION



**CLASSES** 

PREVENTION

FALL

# **THIS YEAR** 1 IN 4 SENIORS

will experience a fall. This FREE six-week class series is designed to help seniors stay independent and prevent falls through exercise and discussion about fall risks. Every Tuesday Jan 14- Feb 18 1:00pm-2:00pm

# Atascadero Library

6555 Capistrano Ave Atascadero



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

FOR MORE INFORMATION 805-781-1561 mzulimclark@co.slo.ca.us

### STAY ACTIVE. IMPROVE SAFETY. PREVENT FALLS.



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

### Atascadero Library



Learn the difference between natural and process sugars, discover hidden sugars in your food, and the deal with artificial sweeteners. And more!

# Sweet Success: a Presentation on Sugar

Feb. 14 (FRI) @ 11:00 AM

All ages welcome!



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

### **Atascadero Library**



# Bee Keeping 101

# February 15th (SAT.) @ 11AM

Beekeeper, Erin Holder, will discuss the basics of keeping bees.



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

### **Atascadero Library**



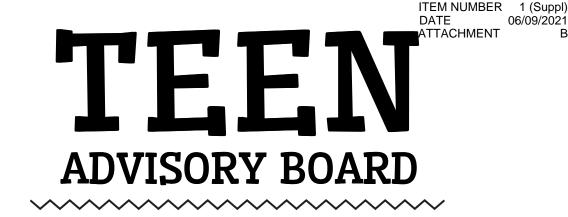
# Turtle & Tortoise Rescue Saturday, February 22, 2:00

Learn about the care and conservation of turtles from the Turtle & Tortoise Rescue of Arroyo Grande. They will bring turtle visitors! All ages.



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

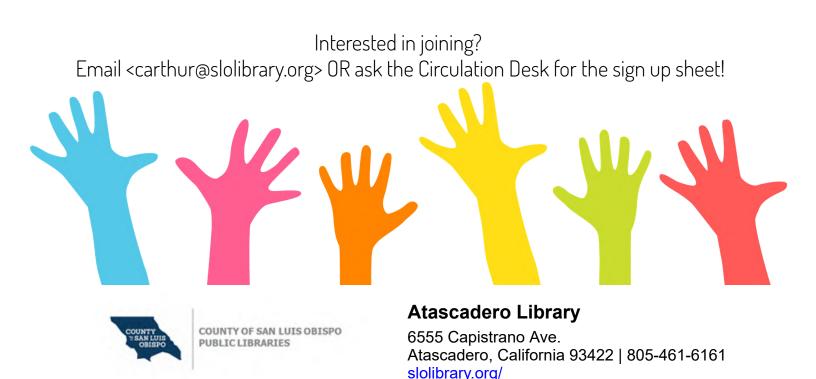
### **Atascadero Library**



Want to have a say? Want to volunteer for the library?

# Join us as we discuss teen programs, space, and collection.

Meetings on every 3rd Friday of the month at 3:30pm at Atascadero Library



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# Free Tax Preparation Software Assistance

Prepare and file your taxes online using MyFreetaxes.org! No income limits are imposed, but fees may apply depending on schedule prepared. United Way is offering free software assistance each Sunday from Feb 9 to April 5, excluding Feb 16. Walk-in hours are from 11am-4pm.

# Materials to bring

- 1. Photo ID for taxpayer and spouse
- 2. Original Social Security Card or ITIN for each person on tax return (copies accepted). Contact your local Social Security office to make an appointment to order a copy if you cannot find yours prior to your tax appointment.
- 3. W-2 or 1099-MISC for all jobs held in 2019
- 4. All 1098's, 1099's, 1095-A's and any other tax forms
- Voided check or savings account and routing # for directed deposit refund
- 6. Last year's tax return (if available)
- 7. Childcare provider information with name, address, etc.
- Landlord's name, address and phone number for renter's credit

# Locations

Atascadero Library 6555 Capistrano Ave Atascadero, CA 93422 Arroyo Grande Library 800 W Branch St Arroyo Grande, CA 93420

Los Osos Library 2075 Palisades Ave. Los Osos, CA 93402 SLO Library 995 Palm St San Luis Obispo, CA 93401



KSBY(

### United Way of San Luis Obispo County

For more information visit UnitedWaySLO.org or call (805) 541-1234











County of SLO Public Libraries

# **E-device Training**

# 10:00 - 11:00 FRIDAYS



For help using your tablet or smartphone to download library eBooks.

Call 805-461-6161/Donna to sign up or drop in.

Please come prepared with your passwords and bring your device.



E-device Training

COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

### **Atascadero Library**





### CITY OF ATASCADERO DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

# MINUTES

### Regular Meeting – Wednesday, November 18, 2020 – 2:00 P.M. City Hall, 6500 Palma Avenue, Atascadero, CA

(Meeting held by teleconference)

### CALL TO ORDER - 2:00 p.m.

Acting Chairperson Dariz called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m.

### ROLL CALL

Present:	Committee Member Duane Anderson Committee Member Mark Dariz Committee Member Emily Baranek Committee Member Heather Newsom
	Commutee member rieather Newsonn
Absent:	Chairperson Roberta Fonzi (excused)
Staff Present:	Community Development Director, Phil Dunsmore Senior Planner, Kelly Gleason Assistant Planner, Mariah Gasch
Others Present:	Frances Romero Loch Soderquist Various members of the public

### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION: By Committee Member Anderson and seconded by Committee Member Newsom to approve the Agenda.

Motion passed 4:0 by a roll call vote.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

None. Acting Chairperson Dariz closed the Public Comment period.

### **CONSENT CALENDAR**

### 1. <u>APPROVAL OF DRAFT MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 4, 2020</u>

MOTION: By Committee Member Anderson and seconded by Committee Member Baranek to approve the Consent Calendar.

Motion passed 4:0 by a roll call vote.

### DEVELOPMENT PROJECT REVIEW

2. <u>DESIGN REVIEW OF A MINI-STORAGE AND CO-WORKING OFFICE USE</u> EVELOPMENT AT 11450 VIEJO CAMINO AND 11505 EL CAMINO REAL

The request consists of preliminary design and neighborhood compatibility of a mini-storage and co-working office use w/approx. 56,330 sf of storage space, a 2,000 sf workshop, and 3,320 sf of co-working office space in the Public zoning district. The project includes a Master Plan of Development, Zone Text Change, Lot Line Adjustment, realignment of a natural drainage feature, and a remainder parcel for future development.

• <u>Recommendation</u>: Staff requests the DRC review the proposed design and direct the applicant to make any modifications to the site or building design as necessary. (DEV20-0076)

Director Dunsmore introduced and gave a history on the project.

### **EX-PARTE COMMUNICATIONS**

All Committee members stated they received the same emails and letters.

Committee member Newsom spoke with the applicant and heard the project previously at the DRC and Council.

Committee member Baranek spoke with the design team.

Committee members Anderson, Baranek and Dariz reviewed this previously at the DRC meeting on June 24, 2020.

Director Dunsmore stated that this is a new application. Dunsmore noted that the primary focus of the DRC is to determine if the land use compatibility findings can be made with the improved design or whether the land use compatibility issue remains regardless of design.

Planner Gleason presented the project.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

Emails received (Exhibits A-H) were distributed to the Committee prior to the meeting.

The following members of the public spoke during public comment: Frances Romero who made a presentation (Exhibit I), Loch Soderquist, Sharyn Malizia, Max Zappas, Ted Lawton, Vy Pierce, and John Malizia.

### Acting Chairperson Dariz closed the Public Comment period.

Staff and the applicant answered questions raised during public comment.

### Acting Chairperson Dariz re-opened the Public Comment period.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

The following members of the public spoke during public comment: Frances Romero, Max Zappas and Vy Pierce.

### Acting Chairperson Dariz closed the Public Comment period.

The applicant (Frances Romero on behalf of Scott Newton) informed Director Dunsmore during the meeting that they would like to modify the proposed co-working space into an assembly/community room. Director Dunsmore stated that this amendment would remove the need for a Zoning Text Amendment

MOTION: By Committee member Anderson and seconded by Committee member Baranek to approve the project concept redesign to include public assembly (community room) and mini-storage, and that the committee is in agreement that the design and land use is compatible with General Plan Policy.

> Motion passed 3:1 by a roll call vote. (Newsom voted no)

Planner Gleason stated that this project will not go to City Council for final action, unless it's appealed. It will move on to Planning Commission for a use permit, once staff receives a complete application.

### COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS AND REPORTS

None

### DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Dunsmore stated that the next meeting is scheduled for December 2, 2020, to hear the Dove Creek Commercial Amendment project.

### ADJOURNMENT- 3:40 p.m.

The next regular meeting of the DRC is scheduled for December 2, 2020.

### MINUTES PREPARED BY:

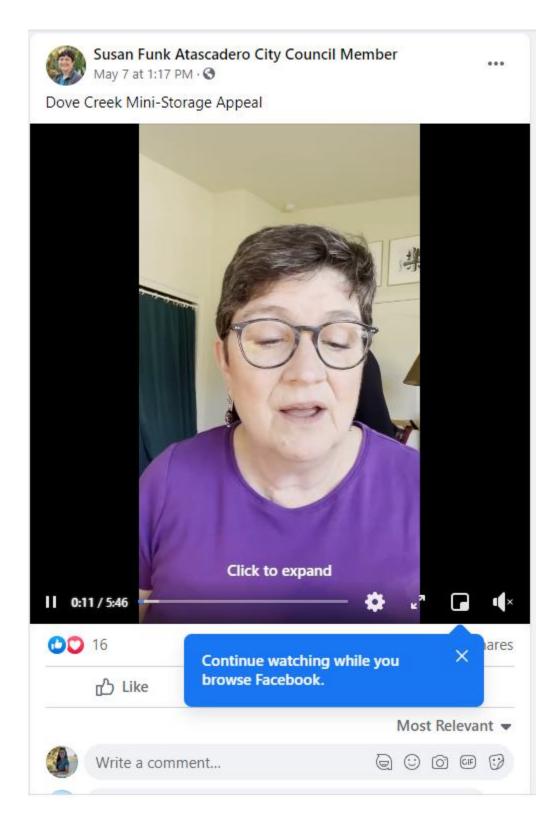
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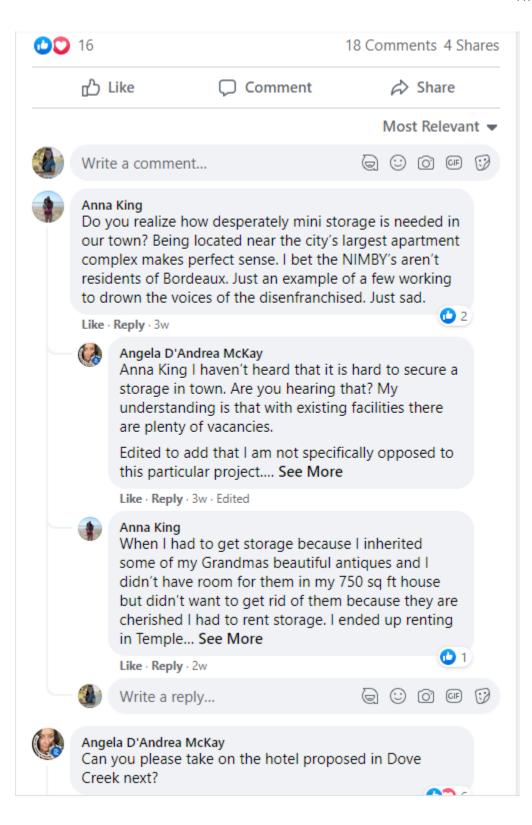
Annette Manier, Recording Secretary Administrative Assistant

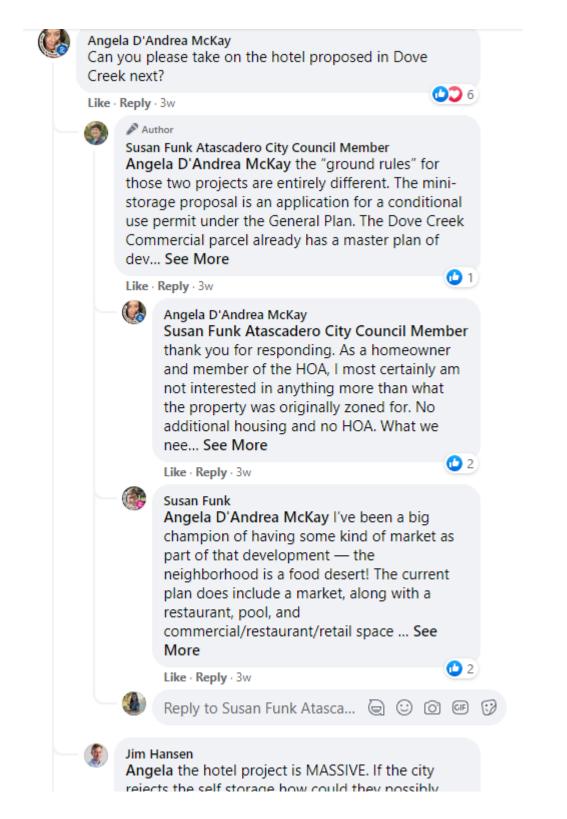
Adopted 12/2/2020

The following exhibits are available in the Community Development Department:

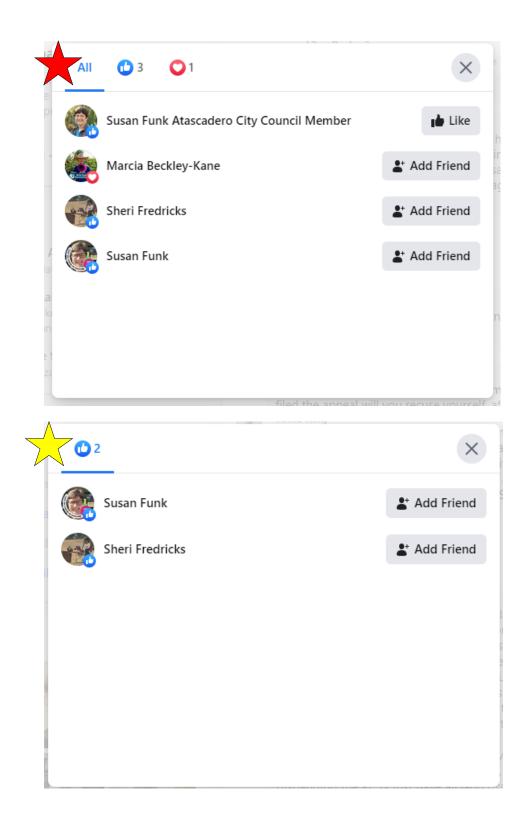
Exhibit A – Email from Nancy Ayres Exhibit B – Email from Justin Crawford Exhibit C – Email from Justin Crawford Exhibit D – Email from Brianna Doran Exhibit E – Email from Cathy LeMoine Exhibit F – Email from Janet Murrieta Exhibit G – Email from Susan Sparling Exhibit H – Email from Susan Sparling Exhibit I – Applicant's presentation











#### Scott Newton

I have read your appeal several times and I don't understand why you feel the Planning Commission (PC) was "confused" & that the final decision should rest with the City Council (CC); this makes no sense to me. The CC appoints a PC to make decisions and a CUP is clearly a PC decision. Your PC had a robust discussion and an honest deliberation, they actually shared their thought process, which was refreshing. To appeal their decision in the manner that you have is just a slap in the face to their efforts. If you believe that the PC has no value or is incapable of making a reasoned decision, please consider disbanding the PC & just have all land use projects go straight to the City Council.

Like · Reply · 2w

#### Author

Susan Funk Atascadero City Council Member Scott Newton , thank you for taking the time to comment. The right to appeal Planning Commission decisions to the City Council exists in City code and can be exercised by an applicant or an opponent of a project (with fee) or a member of the City Council or Planning Commission without fee. One always hopes this right will be exercised judiciously. This is the first time I have filed such an appeal, and I did so at this time for the reasons stated in my letter. I will respond directly to you through my Council email.

01

Like · Reply · 2w

#### Scott Newton

Susan Funk Atascadero City Council Member, I think you might want to review the PC meeting again. Your email states issues with the site plan that was presented. There was no change in location or layout of the building and thus no issues arose about tr... See More

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